



Cook Off Information Packet

Section V

Mailing Address:
41 East 400 North #210
Logan, UT 84321

BASIC FOOD JUDGING GUIDELINES

BEFORE THE CONTEST:

- 1) Read and understand all the food judging rules and contest rules.
- 2) Have a professional attitude and appearance. You have been invited to judge because your good judgement is trusted.
- 3) Have knowledge of foods and food preparation methods.
- 4) Know garnishing techniques. Know what principles govern good garnishing.
- 5) Set aside personal preferences and prejudices.
- 6) Judge each item on its own merits.
- 7) Know Dutch oven cooking techniques. Remember your own experiences as a contestant if you have been a contestant in the past.
- 8) Come relaxed with a clean palate (avoid tobacco, alcohol, or strong foods prior to judging).
- 9) Take time to read and study the contest recipes. Make notes on the recipe sheets to watch for specific ingredients or procedures. Example: if a recipe calls for sourdough, the texture of the bread will be heavier and have larger air pockets.

AT THE CONTEST:

- 1) Be prompt; attend the judges meeting for last-minute instructions and questions.
- 2) Meet the contestants. A good judge will NEVER judge the food based on his/her feelings of the contestants. If you cannot put bias aside then you SHOULD disqualify yourself from judging.
- 3) Rank recipes according to difficulty. An easy recipe done well may be more successful than a hard recipe poorly executed. However, if there is a tie or two dishes seem equal, the one with the greater degree of difficulty should get the higher score.
- 4) Prepare judging sheets. Make sure your sheets are labeled with team number (names if applicable), name of dish, etc. When the actual judging takes place, things happen quickly. Make sure you can flip from sheet to sheet quickly for reference and note taking.

FOOD JUDGING:



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- 1) Be sensitive with your comments. One judge was heard to say "Not another cherry pie! I think I'm gonna be sick!"
- 2) Any questions should be directed to the head judge. Do not influence the decisions of other judges with your comments or body language.
- 3) Be aware of food safety practices. Any unsafe food should be brought to the attention of the head judge. He/she can decide what should be done.
- 4) Use all of your senses to determine food quality.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF GREAT FOOD:

Breads: The size of the loaves or rolls should be uniform, the rise should be even, the baking color should be uniformly golden brown on the top, sides and the bottom. The crumb should have some luster. The aroma should have a fresh quality. The texture should be even and not coarse. Sourdough breads may have a coarse texture due to rapid production of gas, but should be even in texture. Breads made with milk instead of water tend to have a courser texture as well.

Cakes and Pies: Cakes should be moist, not flat, even textured, and should not crumble to pieces. The pie crust should be flaky and tender and the filling should be set up and not running all over the dish.

Meat Main Dishes: The cooking should present the meat hot, tender and moist. Beef goes tough as it cools. Spices and flavors may be added by marinades and during cooking. Chicken should be tender and moist when served. Fish should be flaky, not mushy.

Vegetable Main Dishes: Jump right into the debate between soft and soggy versus crisp and tough cooked vegetables. The final condition should result in the flavorful, colorful vegetables being easy to eat. Strong vegetable flavors such as onions or cauliflower should be muted in the preparation and cooking process.

NOTE: If a dish is being cooked that you are unsure of what it should end up looking, tasting or feeling like, ask the head judge for that information. Become informed as to what the texture should be like.

JUDGING STEPS:

- 1) Was the dish presented on time and according to contest rules?
- 2) Look for dishes that are the best you have ever eaten. Ask yourself, "Would I be proud to serve this to my guests?" A winner should be a good example of all around quality, not just a gimmick.
- 3) **SEE:** Evaluate presentation. Do a visual inspection. Look for color, appropriate use of garnishing, and eye appeal. Is the dish evenly cooked? Penalize gaudy garnishes that hide the food, or are not edible. Extra



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décor should not result in additional points or a higher placement.

- 4) **SMELL:** Check the aroma. Check for off smells, burned food or overpowering smells, i.e. too much seasoning or flavoring.
- 5) **INSPECT:** a representative judge should be assigned to cut into the dish for all judges to inspect at the same time. This initial inspection is vitally important. The person cutting the food should display top, bottom, sides and center of the item. Check for food that is raw, undercooked, overcooked, off-colored, or burned. Any problems evident at this inspection can be eliminated at this point. Take a small sample and inspect more closely. Inspect texture. Make sure the food is uniform.
- External inspection:** Check for color, symmetry of form, evenness of cooking, volume, surface character, and aroma. Reward even cooking that results in a uniform color and surface texture such as the golden brown rolls with crisp crust and the evenly browned meat. Penalize spotty cooking, burned spots, raw, tough, soggy, brittle, or crumbling results.
 - Internal inspection:** Dig in and look at the bottom. Seek to discover areas that are raw, under cooked, burned, off color, or tough. Reward pleasant aroma, uniform color, evenness of cooking, consistent texture, and completeness of the cooking process. Penalize spotty cooking, burned or raw spots, streaks or lumps.
- 6) **TASTE!** Small servings give the taste that you require to adequately judge the flavor. Be hungry for the last sample. The alternative is to be stuffed part way through the tasting. Forcing food down will unfairly influence your judging. (It is important that your mouth be clean and well hydrated. The contest will provide water, vegetables or fruit for cleansing the palate and all necessary serving utensils and paper products. DO NOT use your personal tasting spoon to serve from the dish being judged.) See if the ingredients listed in the recipe were used. Example: if the recipe calls for mint, can you taste it? Is it too strong? Are the flavors appropriate for the dish? Meats should be tender and easy to chew. They should be free of gristle and full of flavor. Fish should be flaky and moist. Take small portions and do not mix samples. Change plates as necessary. Deduct points for rancid flavors, foreign materials, and missing ingredients.
- 7) As a judge, you should have a strong desire to taste this presentation, especially if you have just tasted many items that are similar. The ideal dish is food that tastes delicious. Reward pleasant use of spices, natural food flavor, evenness of cooking, chewability and aroma. A tip on aroma. When the food is in the mouth, breath in through the mouth and out through the nose. The many aroma sensors in the nose will tell you a lot about the food. Penalize for toughness, off flavors, rancid oil flavor from improperly seasoned cast iron, burned food, foreign objects, ash, flatness, unwanted lumps, spotty cooking, cold spots, raw spots, missing ingredients, unnatural food colors, and soggy crusts.
- 8) Make plenty of written notes. You may not remember something about a specific dish after you have tasted another 14. Quick notes taken during every step of the evaluation will help when you step away from the judging table and assign your final scores. Notes will also be helpful for you if a team wishes to discuss their



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dish when the contest is over.

- 9) Use the scale at the top of your judging sheets and award each dish points based on its own merit and not comparing it to the other dishes.
- 10) Taste again, if necessary.
- 11) Check and double check your scoring. By this point you should know which dishes deserve the prize. Do your points reflect that? In the final analysis, you are not comparing dishes; you are evaluating how well each team executed their chosen recipe. If two dishes are equally executed, the one with the highest degree of difficulty should receive the highest score.
- 12) Review for errors.

NOTE: For those running the contest: If judges written comments are to be given to the contestants, always remove the identity of the judge.

AFTER THE CONTEST:

Please be available for team questions. Be constructive in all comments.